The Washington Post A-22
The New York Times
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The Wall Street Journal
The Christian Science Monitor
New York Daily News
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Adm. Raborn's Triumph

The Post's obituary [March 13] of Adm. William Raborn, a former CIA chief, triggered the memory of those of us who had been "kidnapped" by him to develop the world's first submarine-launched nuclear missile, the Polaris. Adm. Raborn had a "hunting license" giving him the right to have any Navy civilian or officer for a small team in SP. SP meant the Special Projects Office, a cover-up name to hide the office's secret mission. It was hidden in temporary wooden buildings on Constitution Avenue across from the Federal Reserve building. One notable neighbor in these wooden buildings was Adm. Hyman Rickover, developer of the first atomic-powered submarine.

There was tremendous pressure on the United States at the time. Only the Soviet Union had intercontinental missile capability, and President Eisenhower chafed under Nikita Khrushchev's threats to take out eastern U.S. cities. The White House needed people like Adm. Raborn to succeed.

Adm. Raborn was always around—weekends and holidays. Everyone worked compulsory overtime. There were no vacations. The admiral's presence was a morale-booster. This pressure lasted several years.

I was under 30 then, and I can recall him hailing me as I ran down a corridor. He was pleased to see me running. Later, one of his regular morale-boosting comments at meetings was his ability to identify his team members because we ran everywhere. The in-house joke was that to succeed with Adm. Rickover you had to speed-read and with Adm. Raborn you had to run a three-minute mile.

Launching missiles in the early years was a combination Fourth of July and Bastille Day: lots of fireworks when missiles broke in two or twirled like a majorette's baton.

Whenever we went to sea to test-fire missiles, each of us harbored private thoughts of seagoing disaster. If something happened, no one would know we were missing. Everything was secret. We could tell no one that we were going to sea in a nuclear submarine. It was not until we lost the USS Thresher with all hands that we were able to have real travel orders, covered by insurance.

The pressure eased on Adm. Raborn and SP as Polaris-equipped submarines went operational and returned safely from long and silent patrols.

Adm. Raborn stayed faithful to all his SP team members, never failing to recognize one or to take a moment to share old memories, even after his unhappy CIA tenure. Nuclear deterrence was his life's great triumph.

BERNARD W. POIRIER
Paris

CONTINUED

OBITUARIES

Former CIA Director William Raborn Jr. Dies

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By Bart Barnes
Washington Post Staff Writer

William Francis Raborn Jr., 84, a retired Navy vice admiral who later served 14 months as director of central intelligence in 1965 and 1966, died of cardiac arrest March 6 at Sibley Memorial Hospital.

Adm. Raborn served 39 years in the Navy before his retirement in 1963. As a military officer, he was known chiefly for his role in managing the development of the Polaris missile. He had a reputation as an inventive thinker and a careful administrator, and he was picked by Adm. Arleigh A. Burke, chief of naval operations, for the critical Polaris assignment in 1955 because of his background as a naval aviator and an ability to get along with people under difficult and stressful circumstances.

A red-headed, barrel-chested and jovial sailor, Adm. Raborn was widely admired in both houses of Congress for his management of the development of the Polaris, the solid-fuel missile capable of being launched from a submerged submarine.

When John A. McCone stepped down as director of central intelligence in 1965, President Johnson named Adm. Raborn to head the agency. Johnson confided to associates that the admiral's standing on Capitol Hill could only facilitate the agency's mission.

At the same time, the president appointed Richard M. Helms, a CIA veteran, as the agency's deputy director. In many technical matters at the CIA, Adm. Raborn relied on Helms's judgment. But there also were complaints within the CIA that Adm. Raborn's military background and his reputation for getting along with Congress were insufficient qualifications for the delicate and sensitive job of supervising and coordinating the nation's intelligence effort. In June 1966, Helms replaced Adm. Raborn as director of central intelligence.

A resident of McLean, Adm. Raborn was born in Decatur, Tex., and grew up in Marlow, Okla. He never saw the sea until 1924, when he arrived in Annapolis as a midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy.

After his graduation in 1928, he served aboard the battleship Texas, then on destroyers until 1933, when he was assigned to flight training at the U.S. Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Fla. He became a naval aviator the following year, then participated in experimental cold weather cruises to Alaska. Later, he was a flight instructor at Pensacola.

Early in World War II, he helped establish an aviation gunnery school in Hawaii. In 1944, he became executive officer of the aircraft carrier Hancock, serving aboard that ship during the Iwo Jima, Okinawa and other campaigns of the Pacific war. He received a Silver Star for his role in directing firefighting operations when an enemy bomb exploded on the Hancock's flight deck on April 7, 1945.

In 1949 and 1950, Adm. Raborn was assigned to the Navy's Bureau of Ordnance in Washington, where he worked on research and development of guided missiles. Subsequent duty included shore and sea assignments, including anti-submarine warfare in the Far East and command of the aircraft carrier Bennington, which underwent a series of violent explosions while conducting air operations 75 miles south of Newport, R.I., on May 26, 1954. There were 220 casualties resulting from those explosions. Adm. Raborn received a letter of commendation for his role in directing removal of the injured and fighting of the fires.

As director of the development of Polaris missiles, he was said to have brought the energy of a sports coach and the enthusiasm of an evangelist to the assignment, and he was known for the pep talks he delivered around the country at the plants and factories where materials for the new weapon were produced. His style of administration was to work with a small group of subordinates, including one whose principal assignment was to search for talent, and he was a firm believer in the management policy that an overworked small staff was generally more productive than an underworked large one.

Adm. Raborn retired from the Navy in 1963 as deputy chief of naval operations for development, then served as vice president in charge of management of Aerojet-General Corp. in California until he was named to head the intelligence agency.

After leaving the agency, he returned to Aerojet-General in the Washington office for three years, then served as president of his own consulting firm, W.F. Raborn Co. Inc., here until retiring again in 1986.

Survivors include his wife, Mildred T. Raborn of McLean; two children, Priscilla Richardson and W.F. Raborn III, both of California; three brothers; and four grandchildren.